

January 31, 2004



# The Consular Communiqué

## Welcome to Bogotá Deputy Chief of Mission Milton Drucker!

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DCM Milton Drucker

tion has an excellent reputation in Washington."

Prior to his arrival in Buenos Aires in August of 2000, Mr. Drucker worked in the Department of State in Washington directing economic policy for the Western Hemisphere. "As an economics officer, I can tell you that strong economies reinforce democratic stability," he said. "What we're doing with the Colombians to increase trade and business opportunities, is going to create jobs and stability for the country. It is a very exciting time to be here."

Throughout Mr. Drucker's career, Latin America seems to have been a favorite destination. He served in Brazil, from 1975 to 1976 and again from 1985 to 1988, and in the Dominican Republic from 1994 to 1997.

Outside of Latin America, Mr. Drucker worked in Conakry, Guinea, from 1977 to 1978, and also at State Department headquarters in Washington. There he focused on international tropical timber trade, environment and trade, commodity policy, technology transfer, the U.N. Conference on the Law of the Sea, and exploitation of natural resources.

Mr. Drucker was a Peace Corps volunteer in Jamaica between 1970 and 1972. He received a B.A. in Economics from Northeastern University in 1969 and obtained a Masters in Economics in 1974.

"Colombians have offered me such a warm welcome," Mr. Drucker said. "I am thrilled to be here and look forward to getting to know the people and country better."

### Visa Call Center : A busy 2003!

**Total calls received:**  
**491,246**

**Average length of  
calls: 8 minutes, 46  
seconds**

**Number of  
Appoint-  
ments:**  
**133,898**



**Dial: 01-  
8000-12-32-  
32 from Colombia  
(with Colpatría PIN  
Code) or 1-877-804-  
5401 from the U.S.  
(with credit card)**

"If you hear it from Milt Drucker," Ambassador William Wood told his embassy audience recently, "you've heard it from me, and if you hear from me, you've heard it from Milt. We think alike."

When Ambassador Wood accepted the job of running the largest U.S. embassy in the world, he knew just who he wanted by his side as his Deputy Chief of Mission: Milton Drucker, an experienced DCM, with a deep understanding of economics and in particular, Latin America.

Freshly arrived from Buenos Aires, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission for three years, Mr. Drucker's first order of business was to get to know each section of the embassy as quickly as possible. Meeting with Bogotá's consular officers and their Colombian colleagues, he said: "I have great respect for the incredible amount of work you do everyday. Your sec-

## Wait Period for Interviews: Down from 18 Months to 6 Weeks!

The year 2003 marked a major service improvement in the non-immigrant visa section. This year, the wait for a tourist visa appointment in Colombia dramatically dropped from a high of nearly 18 months in 2001 to only 6 weeks two and a half years later. How did we do it?

"I believe there were three determining factors," says the Consul General (CG). "The Call Center, more interviews completed by each officer, and our efforts to better communicate with the public. They all required hard work and commitment, and I'm glad to say it worked."

### The Call Center

The telephone scheduling service through which people wishing to travel to the U.S. can arrange interviews at the Embassy, was established in 2002 with great success. It is a sophisticated system that answers public inquiries, schedules appointments quickly, keeps track of cancellations and re-scheduling, and fills empty appointments left open by sudden changes.

"Before, if someone could not come to their appointment we would schedule a second one without canceling the first appointment," the CG explains. "This led to thousands of no-show appointments, with no way to fill them up with new people, slowing us down considerably. Now all those problems are solved."

The Call Center, located in Leon, Mexico, handles over 1,100 calls per day for information requests and appointments. "Applicants with documented, time-sensitive travel needs can get earlier appointments," the CG explains. "We've always had an early appointment system, but now it works more efficiently."

For 2004, the Call Center staff will help the public understand the new requirement to capture fingerprints from all visa applicants. The operators will have up-

dated information on the procedures, and continue to help applicants schedule visa appointments that meet their travel needs. Starting March 1, the Call Center will schedule appointments for applicants revalidating their visas who now also must be fingerprinted.

"So far it has been a great success and there has been a very positive public response," the CG says. "We will continue to do what we can to serve the public better."

### Scheduling more appointments

"We simply needed to do more and do it better," says the CG. As a result the section increased the number of interviews each officer had to do per day. "It was a big effort, but it worked."

The arrival of additional officers also helped reduce the workload. "We benefited from the big push the State Department made to hire more Foreign Service officers," the CG explains. "Having more people at the window doing more interviews certainly helped bring down the wait period. It worked to everyone's benefit."

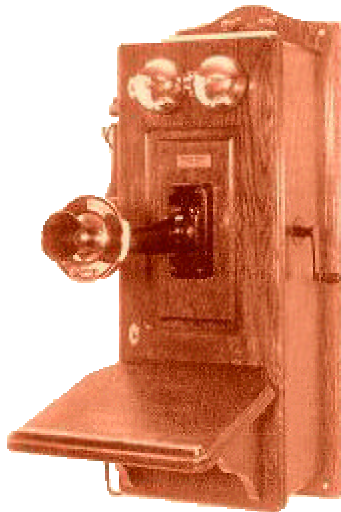
### Outreach

In 2001, the consular section launched an information campaign aimed at educating the public on consular policies and decision-making processes.

"We made a real effort to be as transparent as possible," the CG explains. "People often didn't know why they did or did not get a visa. We told the public what factors went into the decision, as well as our approval percentages. I think the information made people assess more carefully the cost and time involved in applying for a visa, and decide whether or not it was worth while."

### A winning combination

"Contrary to popular opinion, a success story can also be hard to tell," the CG says. "It was never one thing over another that led to this achievement but a combination of factors. Most of all, it would not have been possible without the sustained effort and huge amount of work every person in this section did. And for that, I will always be proud."



# New Procedures for Travel to the United States

New procedures for travelers to the U.S. will require people of all nationalities applying for U.S. immigrant and non-immigrant visas to be fingerprinted at the U.S. Embassy. Travelers will also have their fingerprints scanned upon entering and leaving the United States.

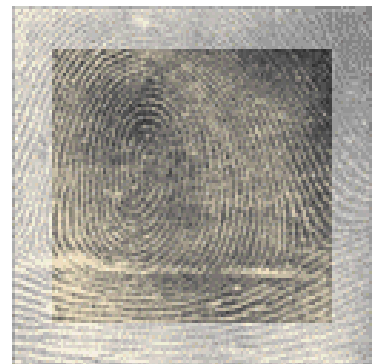
The procedures are a coordinated effort by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of State (DoS) to improve the security of U.S. citizens and visitors to the U.S. The new measures will facilitate legitimate travel, tourism and business, and help protect visitors from identity theft and other security threats.

On January 5, 2004, the DHS instituted at all U.S. airports and seaports the electronic fingerprint scanning of all U.S. visa holders, as they enter and leave the U.S. (This program is called US-VISIT – U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology).

By October 2004, the DoS, through its embassies, will fingerprint all applicants for all U.S. visas. U.S. embassies will fingerprint visa applicants as the technology is installed at each post. The Embassy in Bogotá expects to begin fingerprinting applicants on May 17, 2004.

This coordinated program will consist of the following three steps:

1. Beginning on May 17, 2004, Colombians applying for U.S. visas will be fingerprinted. Each applicant will place the two index fingers on a glass scanner and his/her prints will be electronically scanned. The fingerprints will be immediately checked against a database of individuals with criminal records in the U.S., and will also be stored in a separate database. Eventually, applicants will also have their photos taken. The entire process will add 20 to 30 seconds to the length of the interview. All applicants, whether they obtain a visa or not, will be fingerprinted. There is no charge to the applicant for this new procedure.



2. Upon entry to the U.S., travelers will have their fingerprints scanned electronically and their digital photo taken, as part of the DHS immigration inspection. Together with the standard information gathered from visitors about their identity and travel, the new program will verify the visitors' identity and compliance with visa and immigration policies. This procedure will add about 30 seconds to the entire process.

3. Upon departure from the U.S., visitors will check out at self-service kiosks by scanning their visa or passport, and repeating the electronic fingerprinting process. The departure confirmation will be added to the visitor's travel records to show compliance with U.S. immigration laws. Not all ports of exit have the kiosks installed. In the case of departure from a port without this technology, passengers will not be penalized for failure to check out under US-VISIT.

All data obtained from the visitor is securely stored as part of the visitor's travel record. This information is made available only to authorized officials and selected law enforcement agencies responsible for ensuring the safety and security of U.S. citizens and foreign visitors. There are no plans or agreements to share fingerprints with any foreign government.

Individuals with valid visas do not have to come to the Embassy to be fingerprinted until the visa expires and they want to apply for a new one.

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## Catching Impostors On Board

The Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) is working with host country officials to address the growing problem of "impostor travelers." In recent weeks, FPU has worked on a number of cases where travelers used stolen, altered, or entirely counterfeit passports in attempts to reach the U.S.

In several cases, impostors seeking to board flights to the U.S. have claimed to be U.S. citizens, presenting stolen U.S. passports as evidence of their citizenship. In some instances, they arranged their hair, jewelry, and makeup to resemble the passport photo.

In other cases, the malafide travelers simply pasted their own photo into the stolen passport. FPU is grateful for the careful work of the airline employees and immigration inspectors at Colombian airports, and will continue to provide them with training opportunities through fraud detection workshops.

FPU has also seen several cases where Brazilian travelers who had previously been denied U.S. visas were

able to obtain counterfeit Brazilian passports in assumed identities. They then placed stolen U.S. visas in the passports and sought to travel to Miami through Bogota. FPU worked closely with the Brazilian Embassy in Bogota to determine that the passports were false and to ensure that the travelers were returned to Brazil, where they now face charges.

Most of the impostor travelers that FPU has seen in the past month have admitted they committed the fraud in order to seek economic opportunity for themselves and their children in the U.S. Unfortunately, they seemed to be unaware of the consequences of their acts. Under U.S. law, making a false claim to U.S. citizenship is a serious offense, and results in permanent visa ineligibility. Likewise, obtaining a false passport for another country is usually a punishable crime in that country.

FPU will continue to collaborate with Colombian authorities to make it increasingly difficult for impostors to travel on fraudulent documents, and to facilitate legitimate travel for the majority of Colombian applicants.

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The following reflect the significant changes that biometrics will have on the Revalidation and Personal Appearance Waiver Programs.

1. March 1, 2004, will be the final date to submit a passport for revalidation to an authorized travel agency.
2. March 15, will be the final date to submit a passport for revalidation directly to the Embassy.
3. As of March 1, applicants who wish to revalidate their visas after March 15, must request an appointment at the Embassy through the Call Center. Appointments at the Embassy for revalidations will begin on April 1, 2004. After scheduling your appointment, you must pay the visa application fee at a Banco Unión Colombiano. The fee is \$100.00, or the Colombian peso equivalent, for each applicant. The Bank will issue an adhesive receipt with a bar code which will indicate the date and time of the interview. The receipt is non-transferable and is valid until the date of the interview. There is no reimbursement for loss or theft.

Visas with more than six months' validity remaining may not be revalidated. Therefore, please keep in mind that if a visa is valid until September 15<sup>th</sup> 2004 or later, an applicant must schedule an appointment, through the Call Center, for a future visa.

In short, all applicants now need to schedule an appointment for an interview at the Embassy.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation as we implement this new security measure. Further information can be found by visiting the U.S. Embassy Bogotá website at <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia> or Department of Homeland Security website at [http://www.dsh.gov/us-visit\\_](http://www.dsh.gov/us-visit_)





## U.S. Passports to Include Readable Chip

A recent change to U.S. law requires that countries whose citizens may enter the U.S. under the Visa Waiver Program, issue passports that incorporate a biometric identifier. The biometric identifier must comply with standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The deadline for compliance is October 26, 2004. The biometrics solution for passports must be globally interoperable, must protect the privacy of the bearer, and must be capable of being securely stored in travel documents.

In May, ICAO approved the following biometric standard for machine-readable travel documents: Facial recognition as the globally interoperable biometric for identity verification of travel documents; fingerprint and iris images to supplement facial images as additional biometrics (if a country so desires); a high-capacity contact-less chip as the medium for storing biometric images on travel documents; and use of a digital signature as the method for securing data written to a contact-less chip.



In August, the Department of State (DoS) began an initiative to include a biometric identifier that meets ICAO specifications in U.S. passports. The biometric passport, also known as the electronic passport, adopts the ICAO facial recognition standard, but does not preclude including fingerprints or other biometric identifiers at a later date.

To complement the introduction of the biometric passport, DoS has begun a complete redesign of the passport. The size and cover colors will remain the same but the visa page designs will be different and several new security features will be added. DoS has successfully created prototypes of passports with embedded chips, and expects to award a contract for passport production by January 31. A limited number of chip passports may be issued beginning October 26, with full implementation by early 2006.

## CREDIT CARDS SOON TO BE ACCEPTED FOR PAYMENT OF SOME VISA FEES

The U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, along with most embassies around the world, went through a recent software upgrade that will allow the acceptance of credit cards for payment of all consular fees listed on the Schedule of Fees. The exception is the MRV (machine readable visa) fee, which is now paid through Banco Union. It will not be possible to break a consular charge into "quotas;" the credit card will be charged one time for the entire fee.

This new technology will provide better service to the consular public. We plan to begin accepting credit cards on February 1, 2004.

Acceptable cards are Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Novus/Discover, Diners, and "logoed" debit (purchasing) cards displaying the Visa or MasterCard logo.

To view the complete Consular Schedule of Fees, please visit <http://travel.state.gov/2002feechart.html>

## How to contact the Consular Section

For all consular information on visas, supporting documents, how to schedule an appointment, stolen/lost passports, etc., visit our web page: <http://usembassy.state.gov/colombia>.

**Non-immigrant visas** : Call the Visa Information Call Center by obtaining a PIN code at any Colpatria bank. Then call the Call Center at 01-8000-12-32-32. From the U.S., dial 1-877-804-5401. There is a credit card access fee for U.S.-based numbers. From within Bogotá, dial 346-9150.

For **Immigrant Visas** information, call 571-315-1566 between 3 to 4 p.m., on Tuesdays. Priority dates for all immigrant visas are listed at [http://travel.state.gov/visa\\_bulletin.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa_bulletin.html). The e-mail address is [IVBogota@state.gov](mailto:IVBogota@state.gov)

For the **Fraud Prevention Unit**, call 571-315-2497.

For **American Citizens Services**, e-mail questions to [acs\\_bogota@state.gov](mailto:acs_bogota@state.gov).

No visa questions will be answered at these numbers.

## Community News: Embassy Volunteers Support Local Children



### FSOs help local kids

The generosity of the J. Kirby Simon Foreign Service Trust helped a group of Foreign Service Officers at U.S. Embassy Bogotá acquire basic clothing and other personal items for 37 abandoned children affected by cerebral paralysis. Once the supplies were bought, there was a special “Christmas gift unwrapping” ceremony, which the children particularly enjoyed.



### Toy for Tots



The 2003 U.S. Embassy Bogotá and U.S. Marines ‘Toys for Tots’ Campaign was more successful than ever. Embassy volunteers kicked off the ‘Toys for Tots’ event in November with a bake sale that raised over U.S.\$1,100. The campaign was able to provide clothing and toys for 720 disadvantaged children and orphans in seven schools around Bogotá. Here embassy staff distribute gifts and lunch at the Colegio Santa Francisca Romana. Congratulations to all!!!

